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Vegetation Assemblages

Indicator: General vegetation landcover identified by satellite inventory. Vegetation assemblages are plant communities, shown here grouped by categories of most interest to BLM lands.

Key Findings: Vegetation characterization at this level of detail is a basic descriptor rather than an indicator. Mosts BLM lands are not forested. Rather, they contain primarily arid or semi-arid habitats consisting of shrubs and grasslands. Forested BLM lands occur mostly in the O & C lands in western Oregon.

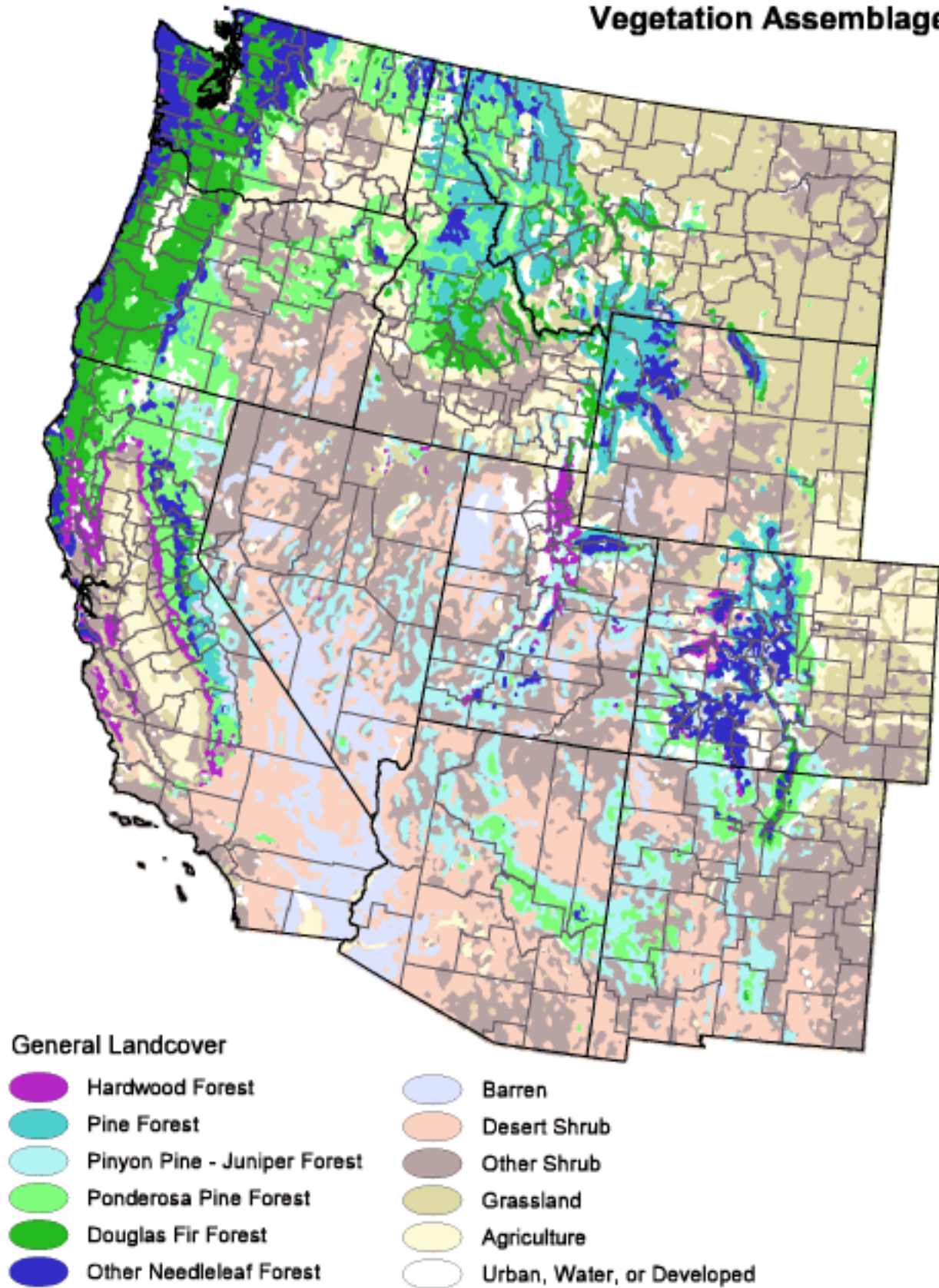
Limitations: It can serve as a communication tool to aid in understanding the nature of the public lands. Beyond that, it is of limited use for land management purposes without meaningful indicators of vegetation condition. The data were originally presented in a greater number of categories, which were reduced to those shown.

Source: Fire Sciences Laboratory, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Missoula, Montana. This data set was produced by combining: (1) non-forest data from the 1990 Land Cover Characteristics data set (United States Geological Survey (USGS), Earth Resources Observation Systems (EROS) Data Center); and (2) forest data from the 1992 Forest Resources of the United States data set (United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, General Technical Report RM-234). This map presents this data smoothed using a 10x10 cell window.

Comments: The BLM generally lacks vegetation information to form a suitable baseline for monitoring the effectiveness of management actions. Several BLM states and field offices, as well as other agencies, have generated vegetation classifications and maps from satellite imagery (e.g., Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer (AVHRR), Landsat). Alaska BLM has established a statewide protocol through the Alaska Geographic Data Committee for an ongoing effort to gather suitably accurate data using Landsat imagery. However, over the rest of the Bureau, such efforts have not been well coordinated, and resultant maps are generally not compatible. Other types of BLM vegetation data (for example, ecological site inventories) are not consistent among field offices, provide incomplete coverage, and are often not in a form that permits spatial display and analysis.

Since vegetation is so important in determining the condition of the land, the BLM should re-evaluate its current approach(es) and invest in a new strategy. The goal should be to generate or acquire vegetation data that is: (1) consistent across (at least) regional biophysical units and ownership patterns; (2) detailed enough to provide meaningful indicators of condition; and, (3) sufficiently economical to allow the process to be repeated periodically to document trends. To reach this goal will require interagency cooperation, recognition of existing standards (i.e., Federal Geographic Data Committee National Vegetation Classification Standard,) and a willingness to compromise to achieve a workable level of consistency.

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Scale 1 : 12,000,000

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